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## REVIEWS AND NOTES

WAY, ARTHUR S.: *The Lay of the Nibelung Men*. Cambridge, England. The University Press. 1911. XXI + 325 pp. 8°.

For over one hundred years serious attempts have been made to interpret for the English speaking public the greatest German epic. In 1904 F. E. Sandbach ("The Nibelungenlied and Gudrun in England and America, London") with great thoroughness discussed the various reprints, essays, references and translations which had appeared up to his time. Of all the contributions he mentions, we shall glance at two which may still be of use to the modern reader.

The greatest landmark in this field—as S. justly points out—will always be Carlyle's sympathetic and appreciative essay, which has profoundly influenced writers on the Nibelungenlied to this day. To the "Superman, Carlyle", the titanic energy of the character of the mediaeval lay appealed with elective affinity. Yet Carlyle's literary appreciation at times fell short of justice. So his assertion that the poet "had little power of delineating character"—unthinkingly repeated to this day—has proved misleading to real understanding of the poem. It is true that the character of Siegfried shows the result of insufficient amalgamation of several versions, but the "doughty and generous knights", Gunther, Gernot, Giselher, Ruediger and Dietrich, are carefully differentiated, while Kriemhild stands out as one of the most powerfully conceived personalities in literature, even though the mediaeval poet does not trace step by step the profound changes which life produces in her. In her case, Carlyle fails to note that most significant point of characterization (found in the version he used) where Kriemhild rises to diabolical heights of vengeance in the sacrifice of her own child for the purpose of calling out Etzel's rage against her kin. In Hagen—that absolutely consistent exponent of the Pagan-Germanic view of life—is reached the climax of character delineation in our poem, a prophecy of renaissance methods as exemplified in Shakespeare.

Of the translators mentioned by Sandbach we may still recommend as useful Margaret Armour (cf. Sandbach pp. 76 ff.). In spite of her many inaccuracies, which S. scores with justifiable severity, her book gives the reader a very fair idea of the original and proves charming reading. Furthermore, a good prose translation of any great epic has always its *raison d'être*, because of the larger freedom with which the author can fit his language to the spirit of the original. Last-

ly, Miss A.'s book is more accessible than the rest, because it has recently been republished in cheap form in *Everyman's Library*, London and N. Y., S. A.

Since the appearance of Sandbach's work in 1904, two new and original efforts at Englishing the Nibelungenlied have appeared, each of which attempts the problem with a different method.\*

The work of George H. Needler (*The Nibelungenlied*, translated into Rhymed English Verse in the Meter of the Original, New York, Holt & Co., 1904) is marked by a scholarly spirit, as appears both in the Introduction and the Translation. The former treats of the various versions of the legend, and the most important questions connected with the poem (origins, manuscripts, etc.). However, in the paragraph "Poem and Saga in Modern Literature" (xxx f.) the omission of Ibsen and William Morris (to say nothing of Jordan) is perplexing, and the sweeping condemnation of Wagner's text seems absurd (XXXI). On the other hand, the selection of Ms. B. as a basis of translation is commendable, since Braune has shown that this version is most probably nearest the original.

In the translation Needler evinces an evident understanding of Middle High German—an advantage which saves him from many traps into which less well prepared translators before and after him have fallen. So, for instance, he does not render *milte* & *rich* with "*mild*" and "*rich*" respectively, nor *arbeit* with "labor", nor *hōchgezit* with "marriage-feast"; nor *versprich* with "promise"; nor *liebe* with "love" instead of "joy"; nor *aber* with "but" when it is used in connection with *sprechen*. Occasional lapses should not be quoted against him with too great severity, as when *ein* is translated by "one" where it evidently means "this" or "you" 955. 1; 983, 2; especially 1783, 2 where Hagen lays "*ein vil liehtes Wāfen*" across his knee, i. e. not a "sword" but "the [famous] sword which had belonged to Siegfried. It is more perplexing to have *dô* (2373, 2) rendered by "though"; and when King Etzel's cry of *Wāfen!* (2374, 1) is rendered by "To Arms!" the effect is comic, since any powerful, however unconventional, epithet would have better expressed Etzel's desolation at the wholesale slaughter of his household, than this belated cry to arms.

In conscious opposition to his predecessors, Needler uses

\* In addition to these two works mention should be made of Professor A. B. Shumway's excellent prose translation of the Nibelungenlied (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909). A scholarly introductory sketch and an appendix of instructive Notes make this work especially valuable for the English reader.—Ed.

the original meter—the four-line stanza with an extra foot in the fourth line. He thus reproduces the rhythm, but often at the expense of smoothness and perspicacity. We find such violence to language as: “I deem the thief not I” (849, 1); “tell will we thee aright” (1535, 2); and such linguistic monstrosities as

“Such thing, how hath it been?  
For that thee right joyous / we but now have seen.  
Ne’er lived he so daring / that, having wrought thee ill,  
His life he must not forfeit, if but to vengeance point  
thy will”. (1764)

That this is due essentially to inability to cope with the meter, becomes apparent from other, much smoother passages, such as “How the Queens Berated Each Other” (814 ff.) which gathers in strength and smoothness as it proceeds; the spirited hunting scene (916 ff.); “How They came to Bechelaren” (1650 ff.); the burning of Etzel’s hall (2081 ff.) and others. From the last mentioned we may quote the following stanzas (2111-2118).

2111

To burn the hall commanded Etzel’s wife in ire,  
And tortured they those warriors there with flaming fire;  
Full soon with wind upon it the house in flames was seen.  
To any folk did never sadder plight befall, I ween.

2112

Their cries within resounded: “Alack for sorest need!  
How mickle rather lay we in storm of battle dead.  
’Fore God ’tis cause for pity, for here we all must die!  
Now doth the queen upon us vengeance wreak full grievously”.

2113

Among them spake another: “Our lives we here must end.  
What now avails the greeting the king to us did send?  
So sore this heat oppreseth and parched with thirst my tongue,  
My life from every anguish I ween I must resign ere long”.

2114

Then quoth of Tronje Hagen: “Ye noble knights and good,  
Who’er by thirst is troubled here let him drink the blood.  
Than wine more potent is it where such high heat doth rage,  
Nor may we at this season find us a better beverage”.

2115

Where fallen knight was lying, thither a warrior went.  
Aside he laid his helmet, to gaping wound he bent,  
And soon was seen a-quaffing therefrom the flowing blood,  
To him though all unwonted yet seemed he there such drinking good.

2116

“Now God reward thee, Hagen”, the weary warrior said,  
“That I so well have drunken, thus by thy teaching led.  
Better wine full seldom hath been poured for me,  
And live I yet a season I’ll ever faithful prove to thee”.

## 2117

When there did hear the others how to him it seemed good,  
 Many more beheld ye eke that drank the blood.  
 Each thereby new vigor for his body won,  
 And eke for lover fallen wept many a buxom dame anon.

## 2118

The flaming brands fell thickly upon them in the hall,  
 With upraised shields they kept them yet scatheless from their fall,  
 Though smoke and heat together wrought them anguish sore.  
 Beset were heroes never, I ween, by so great woe before.

Because of its exact metrical rendition and correctness of translation, N.'s works has distinct academic value; but we cannot help feeling that it is not primarily adapted to endear the poem to English readers.

Turning now to the work of A. S. Way (the translator of Homer and Greek tragedy) we feel that we come upon a translation of the poem which—in spite of many flaws—is better adapted than were any of its predecessors to give the Nibelungenlied a home in English literature.

To be sure, W. evidently lacks the philological training necessary to put him abreast of his difficult task. To begin with, his Introduction shows ignorance of the results of modern scholarship, and even of some of the most important sources, and consequently is seriously misleading. Such phrases as "the Eddas or prose epics of Iceland", and "the Volsungasaga of the prose Edda" (p. IX) produce a well-nigh hopeless confusion in one's conception of those three different literary productions: the verse Edda, the prose Edda, and the Volsunga-saga. Again, in treating the difficult question of the Mss., Way shows himself unacquainted with most recent discussions, especially with Braune's investigations. Yet, his acquaintance with Bartsch seems to have led him to the felicitous selection of Ms. B as the basis for his translation. Unfortunately, however, he adds a number of unnecessary and often inconsistent strophes from Ms. C. in order to make his translation "correspond with the widely read and modern German versions of Simrock" (p. XIX). This procedure—reprehensible in Simrock many years ago—is even more regrettable in an English version of today.

In contrast with Needler, W. is evidently less intimately acquainted with the dialect of the original, and hence translates *rich* by "wealthy" (or an equivalent) (pp. 1, 2, 11 ff.); *Alzei* by "Alsation" (p. 2); *gast* by "guest" (p. 15 where it evidently means anything but that); *ir willen* by "thine wish" (p. 41) *brâhte den Herren* by "brought those barons" (p. 127) etc., etc. The cumulative effect of these (and many more little errors of this description) and of the inexact Introduc-

tion is to create a feeling of discomfort and mistrust on the part of the reader. This discord is by no means alleviated by a certain rhetorical element which detracts from the dignified simplicity of the old song. To be sure, there exists here a great, if not insuperable, difficulty in the inherent difference between the German and the English tongues. As the German folk-song and lyric proves (we need but to recall Goethe, Uhland, Mörike) the every-day language of the Germans contains a peculiarly poetic note which renders it extremely fit for simple and direct lyric expression. The same element predominates in this popular epic—dipped though it be in court-atmosphere. In Way's rendition, the simple German text often assumes a foreign—sometimes a hollow gorgeousness.

So the line: *sit lebete diu vil guote / vil manegen lieben tac* (18, 2)

becomes

"And her heart-peace flowed as a river through many a sunlit day" (p. 3);

*er hörte sagen maere / wie ein scoeniu meit* (44, 2)

reads:

"Till the tidings came of a fair-one on a wind of rumour blown" (p. 7).

Kriemhild appears as "the Star of Burgundy or Burgundia" (pp. 7, 8, 38 etc.) or "Queen of Beauty" and "crown of pride", "glory of women" (all on p. 8), also p. 41 and where the original rises to the height of *die vil hêrlichen meit* (54, 4) Way makes her "the Lady of Disdain" (p. 8), while "Fairest Fair" (p. 40) and "a very glory sheen" (113) seem a strange embroidery on *der scoenen* (301, 4) and *der schoenen Kriemhilde lip* (833, 3.) Rhetorical epithets are less liberally bestowed on the heroes. Yet "Star of Chivalry" (p. 15) sounds strange in the mouth of that young fighter Siegfried when he enters Gunther's land with his rough-and-ready challenge. The original reads:

*Ouch hoere ich iu selben der degenheite jehen* (108, 1)

The line:

"Now soon to the fair shall the fearless by the hand of love be led", (p. 7)

seems to baptize euphuistically both Siegfried and Kriemhild. Here the original: *sit ward diu edele Kriemhild / des küenen Sivrides wip.* (47, 4).

A rococo air is given by a quite superfluous interpolation in the line:

"From a stately tiring bower those daintiest feet forth paced" (p. 38),

where the original simply related:

*Von einer kemenâten / sah man si alle gân.* (280, 1)  
*ze Hofe gân* (290, 3) becomes "come where the seed-royal  
 be" (p. 39).

Sentimentally out of character seems Siegfried when he is represented as "*borne down love's dream-river*" (p. 7) for *Do gedâht ûf hôhe minne* (47, 1). On the same page we see him "with the victory in his wing", for which there is no original phrase whatever (see 46, 4). Inanimate objects also come in for their share of gilding. So *des brunnen vluzze* (977, 4) where Siegfried meets his death becomes a spot "where the dimpling ripples laughed" (p. 132); *einem tiefen wald* (926, 1) becomes transformed into "the wood-lawns that the forest's arms enfold" (p. 126) and even towards the very end, though there is a laudable decrease of embroidery as the tragedy proceeds, we find:

"through all the shuddering palace the shivering echoes rang" (p. 318), where the original has the simple and weighty:  
*daz das hûs erdiezen. . . . began* (2324, 4).

Nevertheless, in spite of these lapses from good taste and from sound scholarship, Ways's work is as a whole very much to be commended. It has a swing and rhythm, a spirited rendering of the pagan atmosphere that carry the reader into the very heart of the ancient lay. It was a bold but a very happy thought to adopt—not the meter of the original or a modification thereof—and a consequent division into strophes, but the vigorous ringing line redolent of youthful freshness which Morris's "*Sigurd the Volsung*" has made familiar to English readers as a fitting vehicle for conveying tales of past valor and glory.

As a consequence W. avoids the pitfalls into which more scholarly translators—only to mention Needler—have been lured by strict adherence to the difficult metrical scheme of the original.

Way's style is characterized by great virility and swing, except for the rhetorical elements mentioned above. Especially spirited and happy are "How the Queens spoke words each unto other" (111 ff.); "How Siegfried was murdered" (124 ff.); the final fight between Hagen and Dietrich (318 ff.). To convey to the reader some idea of Way's method, we may quote the following:

"Of the oath will I make swift ending"! that high-born woman said.  
 To her brother she sent her servants, and she bade them smite him dead.  
 And they hewed his head from his body: she held it on high by the hair  
 In sight of the Hero of Troneg. With grief beyond compare  
 And with indignation of spirit he saw the head of his lord.  
 Grimly he turned on Kriemhild, and spake his latest word:  
 "Thou hast indeed made ending according to thy will.

Even as I had foreseen it, so now doth fate fulfil.  
 Dead now is the noble Gunther, the King of Burgundy,  
 Young Giselher, Lord Gernot—yea, dead be the Princes Three.  
 Now, now of the Hoard none knoweth save God and I alone—  
 Never, thou Child of the Devil, unto thee shall its place be known”!

She answered: “An evil requital hast thou rendered into mine hand!  
 This hold I at least in possession, Siegfried’s battle-brand.  
 He bare it, mine own, my beloved, when I saw him for that last time,  
 Ere thou, to my grief everlasting, wroughtest that foul crime”!  
 She flashed it out of the scabbard—her hand he could not stay—  
 For now from the knight she purposed to rend the life away:  
 On high in her hands she swung it, from his body his head did she smite;  
 And King Etzel saw, and he deemed it an evil and bitter sight.  
 “Woe’s me”! cried the King in anguish; “how is he stricken down,—  
 Stricken by hands of a women!—the hero of chieftest renown  
 That ever in battle’s forefront fighting his buckler bore!  
 Were he never so much my foeman, mine heart is for him full sore”!

Then Master Hildebrand shouted: “This thing shall profit her not  
 That she dared to slay him! What cometh to me I care no jot!—  
 Yea, though he brought me also into mortal peril and pain,  
 I will take in any wise vengeance for valiant Hagen slain”!  
 In wrathful indignation on Kriemhild Hildebrand leapt,  
 And the head of that Daughter of Princes from her shoulders his brand  
 hath swept.  
 With horror she saw him before her like the Spirit of Vengeance rise.  
 What availed her shriek of anguish as the death-flame flashed in her eyes?

Dead all round were they lying, the men foredoomed death’s prey:  
 Hewn in twain in the midmost of all a dead Queen lay!  
 Dietrich and King Etzel into sudden weeping broke,  
 And a bitter voice of wailing went up from all the folk.  
 There was the might and the glory of heroes in death laid low;  
 And the people had for their portion lamentation and mourning and woe.  
 This was the dolorous ending of a great king’s festival!  
 So ever is sorrow begotten of joy at the end of all.

We hope that a second edition will give the translator an opportunity to eliminate the blemishes of his work. It would be easy to rewrite—in part at least—the Introduction, in order to make it correspond to the results of modern scholarship. The task of obliterating the rhetorical element would be more subtle, but most alluring to a translator of Way’s ability. The result would be a work which would far outstrip all its predecessors in the field, and give the Nibelungenlied that position in English literature which other German poems like Goethe’s “Faust” have attained through good translations.

In conclusion, a word should be said of the excellent form in which this book comes before the public. Both in printing and in binding, it is a fine example of good, modern, English bookmaking.

CAMILLO VON KLENZE.

*Brown University.*